# How to Avoid the Restlessness of Cabin Fever

by BRANDY OSTLER

## Combating Lupus and Cabin Fever

The winter season is here, and for thousands around the world, they would like nothing more than to hunker down and hibernate for the winter. Allow me for a moment to tantalize your mind with this image: sitting by a warm, cozy fire, snuggled in a blanket, hot cocoa (with little marshmallows) in hand while watching *Frosty the Snowman* on television.

Through a window, you watch the snow as it playfully dances to the ground and holiday lights illuminate the stunning backdrop. Sounds simply divine, doesn't it? It is the time of year for jingle bells, popcorn strings, and holiday specials.

However, I am certain that many can attest to the fact that as the season wears on, cabin fever can soon ensue. Fortunately, for most, this stir-crazy condition is — for the most part — short lived.

However, for those like myself who suffer from lupus and a near constant state of being immunosuppressed, cabin fever can last throughout the year. Being homebound can be challenging and it is important to find creative ways to stay in good spirits and combat the condition of cabin fever.

Through my personal experiences, I have discovered several ways to do this and I have compiled a few tips to share with you that I hope will offer encouragement and some easy to implement solutions to get you through.

### Establish and Maintain a Routine

Many see this as a given, but I can assure you that when no longer faced with (what used to be) your typical day, this can be a challenge. When I was a school teacher, my daily routine was habitual and automatic.

Although now on disability, I have found this to be one of the most vital aspects of my personal wellbeing; not only for myself, but for my family as well.

The routine may look different, but it is important to discover your new rhythm. Get up, take a shower, get dressed, and establish a schedule that you can maintain throughout the day.

This might include taking lupus medications as recommended, meal preparation, light duty chores, therapeutic activities, and even resting or taking a nap as needed.

Will there be days that you don't feel like it? Of course. However, lying around in your pajamas and avoiding personal care can eventually lead to a destructive frame of mind.

Keep some flexibility in your schedule to avoid stress and allow yourself to take it easy when necessary.

**Do Something You Enjoy**

I realize this is an ambiguous statement, but we all have things we enjoy. Get yourself engrossed in a series on Netflix. Watch classic movies or light-hearted romantic comedies. Read a new book (or re-read an old favorite). Listen to an audio-book or music you enjoy (uplifting is best). Journal. Keep your mind sharp with puzzles, thinking activities, or even hand-held video games (a personal favorite of mine is Professor Layton on Nintendo DS).

Organize a family game night or plan theme days. Start a blog. Organize photographs and compile them into albums. Create memory collages or inspiration boards. The list is endless according to what interests you. The key here is to make sure it is *something you enjoy*. If it becomes daunting, choose something else!

*Next page: More ways to combat lupus and cabin fever.*

**Begin a New Hobby**

Perhaps there is something you have always wanted to do, but didn't have the time. Embrace the time on your hands and find a new lupus-friendly hobby you can get excited about. Examples might include crocheting or knitting, canning pickles or jam, growing an indoor herb garden, playing an instrument, writing poetry, sewing or quilting, scrapbooking, crafting, or making fleece blankets for NICU babies or animal shelters. You could also join a Skype club or an online book club.

Get involved in social media if you haven't already — this can help combat feelings of loneliness and provide opportunities to stay in contact with the outside world while maintaining friendships.

You can even start singing karaoke on a home system, even if you're not very good at it like me! It can absolutely add some liveliness to your day! Another idea is to grab a pair of binoculars and bird-watch through the window. Be sure to have a bird identification guide on hand to get the most out of this heart-warming and fascinating hobby.

**Take an Online Class**

More community colleges and universities are offering distance education than ever before. You might decide to enroll in an entire program and earn a new degree.

I am currently in the process of earning my second master's degree in English and creative writing. Or if you prefer, keep it simple and empower yourself with a personal enrichment class or workshop. You can learn how to become an online travel agent, learn a new language, learn how to sketch comics, learn how to paint, or even learn cake decorating.

**Take an Online Class**

Other options include personal finance, the stock market, natural health and healing, genealogy, world religions, cultural studies, graphic design, culinary arts, flower arrangements, voice overs, and even game making.

The possibilities are limited only by your imagination. Simply search for distance education or personal enrichment. If you can think it, it is probably available and it will give you something fulfilling to do with your time and keep you productive, enthusiastic, and inspired.

**Balance Your Mind, Body, and Spirit**

This, I believe, is of the utmost importance. Lupus can wear on you in such a way that you lose your connection with yourself.

There was a time, when first placed on disability, that I did not keep my mind, body, and spirit in a harmonious state. I found that my flares would come on more frequently and more severely.

Although I have suffered with chronic fatigue and pain, I also found that I could not get a restful night of sleep. This may or may not be a ‘spiritual’ quest for you, but you may discover that it will be a calming and holistic experience.

Suggestions here include light yoga, meditation, positive affirmations, aromatherapy, and essential oil utilization. Take a healing bath with organic herbs, essential oils (such as lavender), oatmeal, or citrus products such as lemon peel.

Eat raw vegetables regularly. Use a diffuser with therapeutic oils to produce a relaxed state and sense of calming. Many essential oils and natural lotions come in blends that help combat migraines, insomnia, muscle aches, and joint pain. Keep a book of inspirational quotes by your bed and read a few every morning and every evening, or any time you are feeling stressed.

Enjoy a cup of sleepytime tea before turning in for the evening. Keep an icepack as well as a heating pad on hand. Play relaxing and meditative music (quietly) as you fall asleep. It will help to relax your subconscious mind and allow you to awaken refreshed and well rested.

Since implementing a nighttime routine, I have slept better and feel better equipped to take on the challenges of my day. Ultimately, the more harmonious you feel, the less likely cabin fever will consume you.

It is my hope that some of these tips will encourage and inspire you to make the most of the situation you are in while combatting the dreaded and inevitable cabin fever. The chilly season can be a difficult time of year for many. For some of us, anytime of year can be a challenge to get through.

The ideas I have shared are just a handful. The opportunities for discovering unique and creative ways of keeping your mind occupied and your life fulfilling are abundant.

The biggest factor is optimism! May you be blessed with the best possible health, happiness, and harmony this year and always. Your inner peace awaits!